

HOW IS ONE TO KNOW?

With folk dancing now in demand, many are out on a folk dance "treasure hunt." Everyone explores and everyone gathers materials from anywhere and everywhere. Many gather it from books, others from special institutes for instructors, others from observing other groups, and still others through obtaining it anywhere from 2nd-to perhaps 12th-hand handing over. Many people try religiously to follow descriptions written up, or the nearest thing to their personal understanding and conception of the written word, others do the same from their visual insight. Many, whose purpose is strictly "good time" and nothing else, will willfully adulterate a dance to suit their own needs due to their impatience for reading directions or learning national characteristics and traits of the dance. People of the first category know that they could be wrong, but they do their best. People of the second category know that they are wrong, but, "what of it?" yet we have a greater problem on our hands than the above two mentioned: The ethnic representatives who misrepresent and the material hunters, bona fide people, who are their victims.

There are three types of ethnic groups; traditionalists, choreographers and glorifiers. Traditionalists are interested mainly to perpetuate the folklore of their people in its truest and purest forms, regardless of whether the dance is interesting or silly. The choreographers are bent of changing any folk dance to suit the personal taste of the leader and will incorporate steps and manners whether they are in keeping with the character of his people or not — as was the case Kalvelis, which, thanks God, is losing out in favor of the traditional form. The Glorifiers are a distinct class and, in reality, they should be taken out of the folk dance class; but, they are ethnic groups who take folk dances and dress them up with so much glitter that anything resembling to the original folk dance is purely incidental. The glorifiers usually cater a concert going crowd. Naturally, their purpose is different form. It must be presented epic and operatic. It must have the elan of the ballet and the air of high class society. It is no more a dance of the people and therefore no longer "down to earth." But how is the "treasure hunter" to know? He goes to a concert mainly because a "ethnic" group will be there and they will dance "ethnic" dances and it will prove to him a well from whence he will bring forth a wealth of new "authentic" material. Then they will come back

to their groups and teach them the "real" thing as they saw an ethnic group present — a group who "just came over" and certainly, who else but they should have the real McCoy. Many of the researcher, as mentioned above, are sincere, true and "bona fide" people. But how are they to know what they just saw and were thrilled with is something that is not folk but highly glorified stuff?

I shall only cite two groups who recently toured the country. One is Austrian and one is Lithuanian. Both ethnic and both are groups of good repute. Both do enviable and excellent work. No doubt, and without any prejudice on my part the Lithuanian group outshines the Austrian. However, the Austrian group was the real folk group. Their dances were true and representative. They were Austrian to the very core. The Lithuanian group was theatric. The Cossacks have nothing on the Ciurlionis group. In fact, I'd rather go and see the Ciurlionis group anytime. They are unique, colorful, most unusual and high class, but, definitely not folk, in spite of the costumes, folk material and folk themes of their songs and dances.

During the last five years the Ciurlionis group has been setting the pace and model for the Lithuanian folk dance. While still in Germany they were (and still are) one of the finest and best trained nationality groups among all refugees. Because of their high acclaim they were set as the example for Lithuanian dancing and they brought many laurels for themselves and the Lithuanian people. Many groups sprung up in various DP camps throughout Germany and Austria. The groups of better reputation became so because they were headed and trained by reputed instructors who had ballet training during Lithuanian independence in various foreign countries. Most of them seemed to have gotten their training in Vienna or German cities and who went for the Dance Moderne of the German Impressionistic type of dance. For the most part they were city folk who never know how to do a polka and still don't. Those who do took it out from written books in accordance to the rules written down in Parisian West, it was not the polka indigenous to the people. The concern of the instructors was not tradition but showmanship. How to "wow" the audience. We now have thousands of Lithuanian refugees in the United States. Many cities with Lithuanian colonies have folk dance groups, some as many as five in one city. Most of the leaders are either direct products of the "name" groups of the DP camps, or their descendents.

Please understand... I'm in no way trying to belit-

tle the Ciurlionis group. On the contrary, I am most anxious that they continue this type of work, expand it and create it even more gloriously so that it become a form of a Lithuanian National Ballet, or an art expression of a high caliber based on the Lithuanian folk dance. They are our (Lithuanian) pride and joy. We never had anything like them and we want them for many years to come, carrying the Lithuanian banner into the midst of the non-Lithuanians in their particular beautiful and enchanting manner they developed. What I do wish to stress is my plea to the "researchers" that they learn to distinguish between dances that are folk and dances that are theatric; the place of one is the theatre along with the glitter and make-up, the place of the other is "down to earth", unassuming and simple.

The above discussed problem doesn't seem to trouble other nationality groups as much. Perhaps because they didn't have so strong an influence — wielding groups as the Lithuanians had. However, all nationalities have "glorifiers." The Russians and Jugoslavs in particular. The later, especially, are getting away from Pan-Balkanism and are westernizing their dances. It is now hard to tell what is true and what is "dressed up". But it is the researchers who are the greatest victims, and they, in turn, unintentionally, plant the wrong seeds and help it grow. Why, they obtained the material directly from a "genuinely ethnic" source, therefore, it must be correct!? And how are they to know? Vyts B

VILTIS DID IT AGAIN!

Every year the guests attending a VILTIS concert rave about the excellence of the presentations and express the opinion that the programs are beyond the possibility of improvement, yet, on a succeeding year the same spectators claim that the latest program surpasses in excellence the previous one. That is because VILTIS always manages to add each year something rare and novel. This year the program featured many unique and ancient dances besides outstanding contemporary folk dances. Over 500 people, with many from great distances, showed their appreciation with enthusiastic applause.

The program was opened with a fitting number — Arkan, an ancient, pre-Christian era, Ukrainian dance performed during the spring season to awaken the father sun. It is a circle dance with a basic step which is like a Horra, but very sharp. In the middle of the dance the performers "fall asleep" (Bachko spit). Then, the "father awakens" (bachko vsav) and the dance becomes vigorous, requiring plenty wind for performing. Six "kozak" stalwarts danced it well. They were followed by another synthetic "Kozak", Eddie Kaupas who did a most intricate and virile sword dance which required stamina of a whole army of Kozaks. Four couples from International House performed popular French dances from various regions; Polka Piquee, Era Pelha Det Gat, Le Beau De Gueste and Garcon Volage. The charm of the French dances is their easy and breezy atmosphere.

Vyts Beliajus appeared doing a modern Burmese dance, the style of which is so different from the Hindu or Siamese; it contained poses, leaps, turn and fan flut-

tering runs. Sylvan Wiley and Bill Brooks ran in shouting, invoking names of their saints as they did an ancient Baluchi (now Pakistan) sword dance which commemorated the battle of two factional leaders, Hussein and Hassan. This, too, is an ancient traditional dance with a great deal of sword sparring.

Mexico was represented by our old time VILTITE buddies, Chico and Chabela Hernandez and their talented children, Chiquito and Dona. The two young ones performed beautifully the "Guadajara" and were followed by the parents with "Potorico", a harvesters dance of Michoacan where flirting and machete clanging is combined. In Chicago, among the native Mexican talent, there is nothing better then Chico and Chabela and their children.

Cantor William Wolff made his first debut at a VILTIS concert with a series of Hassidic Nigunim. Being himself of Hassidic extraction and possessing the feeling for it, plus the beauty of his voice, he charmed the gentle audience to whom this was something entirely new. His voice, a resonant baritone, lent itself well to the cantorial type of worshipful and melodic Hassidic nigunim. After two Nigunim, V. F. Beliajus and a group of four from the College of Jewish Studies, appeared in a Hassidic processional portraying the Rebbi out walking with his close Hassidim. Cantor Wolff then sang the "Dudele" A song in which a bewildered Hassidic is amazed at the presence of God everywhere. It is always "Du, du, du..." (You, you, you). V. F. Beliajus danced the part of the Hassid and in the finale all joined in and the audience burst out with a terrific applause.

An ancient ritualistic dance still performed by Punjabi priests around the burning fires to the diety, Agni, closed the first half of the program. A fire burned on an especially contrived "altar" while the dancers, processioned, knelt, leaped over and around the fire; or took the incense sticks, drawing in the smoke and fire and waving the same in various prescribed manners. Toward the end the dance became exhilarated, twirling with dizzy spins but ending rigidly staring at the sun, source of light.

The rare treat of the evening was the first appearance of a group of blind youngsters from the "Light House for the Blind." Some had partial vision, most were totally blind. They danced a square dance, the Lithuanian Kalvelis and the Finnish Spinning Waltz. The audience was overwhelmed and appreciative, and not only the dances were loudly applauded but even the various figures in the dance. An ovation was extended to Mrs. Frances Rose, their teacher, a lovely genteel woman, who devotes several days a week at the light house to lighten the burden of these young people who are in visual darkness, bringing joy to them through the medium of the folk dance. VILTIS, in appreciation, presented her with a beautiful corsage.

The International House group then came out with the elegant court dances of France, Russia and England. As it was at the National Folk Festival, the group, here too, was extremely well received. The costumes of the period and the elegance of the royal courts transformed the lowly stage of the Lithuanian auditorium into an imaginary palace of splendor.

The Japanese were next on the program with the beloved children, Mariko Akiyama and Toyoko Kitahata, impersonating a Samurai and an aristocratic maiden who were forced to leave the castle of their lord in search of happiness. It was a classic Japanese number, maturely and excellently performed by these two mop-